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Colby says probes have benefited CIA

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Washington—William E. Colby, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, said yesterday that the agency has gained new strengths from a year of investigations in the sense that the public now better understands the role of intelligence in a dangerous world.

There is broadening recognition, he maintained, that the CIA is engaged chiefly in collecting and analyzing foreign intelligence and that clandestine political and paramilitary operations overseas—so dramatically exposed in the congressional investigations—are just "5 per cent" of the agency's total effort.

The United States wants an intelligence service different from other countries—one that "comes out of the shadows on the edge of the law" and has more visibility, Mr. Colby said.

He applauded at the same time the provisions in President Ford's new intelligence reforms for "better secrecy" and disagreed with those who see in the strict new rules a potential for future coverups of abuses. The spillage of secrets in the last year has hampered the CIA's ability to obtain sensitive information from friendly foreign intelligence organizations,

Mr. Colby said.

He spoke at a national meeting here of the Reserve Officers Association, a 100,000-member organization of military reservists, and afterward at a press conference.

President Ford dismissed Mr. Colby in his government breakup last November, then asked him to stay on until George Bush, then envoy to

China, could take over in January as the director of central intelligence.

Displaying no disappointment at the turn of events, Mr. Colby, an intelligence officer since World War II, said yesterday that the Bush appointment was part of the new-look in the CIA—an attempt to turn attention from past problems to new intelligence challenges in a world of increasing Soviet and Chinese power.

He said Mr. Ford's reforms were a "substantial move ahead," laying down what intelligence agencies can and cannot do, providing supervision to prevent unfettered operations, "and the essential third point, better secrecy."

"You can't have intelligence without secrecy," Mr. Colby said. But he did not believe the new restrictions, looking toward civil and criminal penalties for unauthorized disclosures of intelligence sources and methods, would facilitate a Watergate-type federal cover-up.

"The commission of a crime should not be classified [secret]," he said, and there could not be punishment under the new rules unless disclosure of genuine secrets is involved.